

## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2017

**Membership of the Parish Council** is still less councillors than our entitlement although we have been actively seeking additional members, with seven councillors out of an allocation of nine, but we have maintained good attendance. We also continue to benefit from regular attendance at the council meetings by our County Councillor, Jessica Fleming, the District Councillor, Derek Osborne, and the local Neighbourhood Watch chairman. The attendance by the Police or a Community Support Officer has stopped this year due to reorganisation and staff reductions. Changes in the local policing structure have resulted in their reports being made available via the Stowmarket Safer Neighbourhood Team web-site rather than delivered in person. This has resulted in very much a second-class service compared with talking to the police officers, with the reports being two months old before being shared.

**Planning applications** have continued to be limited by the lack of vacant land within the settlement boundary. Changes to the national planning policy have moved away from the concept of a settlement boundary defining the envelope for potential development, and proposals for new development are to be considered individually as they are presented. Mid Suffolk District Council Core Strategy recognises that Botesdale and Rickinghall are together considered to be one of twelve key service centres in mid Suffolk. The key service centres are identified for additional housing development, to sustain the services, although the number of dwellings proposed in each centre is not clear. Land previously submitted as land bids to amend the settlement boundary are now expected to return as individual proposals for development, and an outline application for the land south of Back Hills was submitted in February.

**The changes in national planning arrangements** have refocused the requirements for villages to adopt a **Neighbourhood Plan** to ensure that local views on community attributes would be required to be considered when planning applications were submitted. The requirement for these plans to be approved by the District Council originally came at a significant cost, more than our annual budget, but this issue has now been recognised, the process simplified and financial aid to produce neighbourhood plans should be made available. The Council, in partnership with Rickinghall, has facilitated the establishment of a Neighbourhood Plan Forum, and submitted a proposal for a combined plan to MSDC. The plan will not be produced by the councils, although both are represented on the Forum, but includes input from across the local parishes to ensure that the resulting plan is representative of the whole community.

The council is financed through the **precept** as a minor part of our council tax, less than £100 out of a total of £1622 for a Band D property this year, giving the council a budget of £29,200. The Council is investing in additional play equipment for the Playing Field, and speed monitoring displays for which the District Council has approved increases in the council tax.

The Parish Council, in partnership with Rickinghall, has continued to ensure that the Christmas tree remains a festive focus in the Village centre for the visit from Santa. The council welcomed the local support for the Christmas Tree and lights, which help to ensure that the good children of Botesdale and Rickinghall will continue to be rewarded with small presents on Christmas Eve.

The council performs regular inspections of the **Playing Field in Mill Road** and continues to improve the condition of the grounds by regular mowing, maintenance and repairs. The regular maintenance is performed by Tim Gaddis, who also looks after the street cleaning on behalf of the council. Further work is planned this year to respond to

the annual ROSPA safety assessment of the playing field with maintenance and renovation of the equipment, together with additional play equipment for younger children.

The **Annual Litter Pick** was well supported this year, and covered all the local streets and lanes, but we are fortunate that most areas are maintained free of litter throughout the year, maintaining the attractive appearance of the village. The exceptions are the roads out of the village, particularly where there are lay-bys or parking areas which suffer from significant litter and rubbish deposits.

**The Footpaths and Streams Project** has continued, led by Chris Lambert to maintain and improve the conditions of the local footpaths and streams at the end of Fen Lane, liaising with the Little Ouse Headwaters Project, with a small but enthusiastic working party. They have continued to clear a significant amount of debris, trimmed trees and bushes, resulting in improved water quality, and hopefully better conditions for wildlife. Sightings of the birds and creatures of the riverbank continue to be reported, indicative of the popularity of this little footpath. The work close to Fen Lane has improved drainage and reduced the flooding after heavy rains.

**Traffic issues** continue to be raised to the parish council and the Neighbourhood Watch – the twin concerns of speeding and inconsiderate parking, the latter to an extent a result of the success of the food retailers in the village. As a result of the information in the traffic survey conducted last year the council has requested Suffolk County Council to reinforce the Highway Code limitations on parking near the Health Centre by adding yellow lines at the North end of The Drift. SCC Highways have continued to suffer restrictions in funding in common with other local services, and we should routinely report and follow-up on pot-hole and other road repairs required within the parish. Please continue to report issues to our Parish Clerk.

**On the administration front** our parish clerk, Leeann Jackson-Eve provides excellent support from preparing the budget and keeping the accounts in a clear and efficiently presented style to preparing the agendas and minutes of meetings. The increased requirements for openness and transparency in local government have been met the provision of additional data on the parish website <http://botesdale.onesuffolk.net/>, and additional pages have been added to include the details of the development of the Neighbourhood Plan.

**This completes the ninth year** for me as Chairman, and we have been fortunate in having a team of **enthusiastic councillors** in Botesdale, and I thank them and our clerk for their help and support throughout the year. I hope that here will be some new councillors this coming year to fill our current two vacancies, but I suspect that we will start the year with less than a full complement of councillors. Many village groups encounter similar problems, losing members and finding it difficult to replace officials. It seems that although the population of the village continues to rise, fewer people are supporting the village groups, and I would encourage everyone to participate in the community activities which are one of the advantages to living in these villages.

As before, much of the council business is reactive, but there continue to be opportunities for the council to move forward in a way that develops the aspects of village life that we enjoy and provides a sustainable community for the future. Please continue to let us know how the Parish Council can contribute to this goal.

William Sargeant  
Chairman